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Rogue Operation Leaves Many Policies in Tatters

P - By PATRICK LEAHY

With stunning abruptness, disarray in the Reagan Administration's foreign-policy apparatus has been revealed to an astonished world.

The country is shocked to learn that an obscure colonel, Oliver North, working out of the White House basement and, allegedly with little or no knowledge or supervision by anyone else, has been running operations that are certainly improper and maybe illegal. For at least 18 months this man has been channeling arms to Iran through Israel and funneling the profits to the Nicaraguan *contras*.

Straining credulity beyond the breaking point, the Administration would have us believe that North could do this without anyone in the White House, the CIA, the State Department or the Defense Department being aware of it.

Whatever the truth, the reality is that the President's ability to function effectively in foreign affairs is now in jeopardy.

Consider just some of the costs of this rogue operation:

- U.S. anti-terror-policy is in tatters.

- U.S. policy and influence in the critical Middle East is sorely damaged, and our best friend, Israel, is left holding the bag.

- Allied governments that associated themselves with U.S. policy on terrorism and Iran are embarrassed and weakened.

- Our Central America policy has become a debacle.

- The President's relations with Congress have been badly shaken.

There now is graphic proof of what some of us have been saying for several years: This Administration regards Congress not as a co-equal partner to be informed and consulted but as a public-relations problem to be manipulated and evaded.

How have we reached this appalling situation? Just as important, how do we get out of it quickly?

The Reagan Administration's style in foreign policy made a crisis like this almost inevitable. To an amazing degree, years of good luck and skillful public-relations management have masked fundamental deficiencies in the Administration's whole method of conducting foreign affairs.

Distrustful of Congress, fearful of the press, driven more by ideology than by a hardheaded calculation of U.S. interests, the Administration has chosen to substitute covert action and tightly compartmented secret operations for constitutional means of conducting foreign policy. It has preferred to pursue some of its most important activities without the checks and balances of the American political system.

The entire country, not just the Administration, is paying the price for the Iran-contra fiasco. The President is saddled with what could be a long-running crisis at the very time when we need strong, confident presidential leadership.

Hopes for a new arms-control treaty with the Soviets are threatened by continuing internal warfare within the Administration. Only a President in complete control can silence the divisions and set the arms-control process back on track.

A firm counterterrorism policy must be urgently reconstructed. Only the President can accomplish that. But, if he is weakened in his last two years, there is little chance

that Reagan will be able to reunite Congress and persuade our allies and friends not to attempt their own backdoor deals with terrorists and terrorist nations.

The United States needs a coherent Middle East policy. However, only vigorous leadership by the White House offers any real prospect of reviving the moribund peace process and of preventing dangerous instability among our friends in the Persian Gulf area. There is grave danger that such leadership may not be forthcoming.

Getting this crisis behind us quickly should be an overriding national priority. It is in no one's interest, Democrat or Republican, to see this affair drag on, becoming an obsession in the White House, mesmerizing the press, crippling the President and preventing restoration of bipartisanship in foreign policy.

There must be prompt, full disclosure of

all information. Congress should conduct its own independent, expeditious investigation. Any official, however high in rank, who is shown to be involved in improper or illegal activities or in dereliction of duty must be removed. Anyone found to have violated criminal statutes should be prosecuted.

The entire foreign-policy structure of the Administration should be thoroughly reviewed, reorganized and subjected to the checks and balances of responsible executive-branch and congressional oversight. The National Security Council must be returned to its original role of advice and coordination, but not implementation, of policy.

Finally, I believe that the President himself should reconsider his own way of doing business.

The unpalatable truth is that President Reagan has carried the "chairman of the board" approach to management too far. He has delegated too much power and responsibility, and he has remained too aloof from the details of what his subordinates are doing in his name. He has been repeatedly embarrassed publicly by his lack of knowledge of important specifics of major foreign-policy programs. He has relied too much on ideologically driven "special assistants," and not enough on his Cabinet heads.

Above all, it is time that Harry Truman's well-known adage—"The buck stops here"—reemerges as the guiding principle in the Oval Office.

Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) is vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.